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*With the Author's Request*  
*The Endemoniadas of Queretaro.*

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### THE ENDEMONIADAS OF QUERETARO.

THE belief in diabolical possession, which so long postponed rational treatment of nervous and mental disease, offered a wide field for the perverted ingenuity of those who from various motives were inclined to speculate upon it. Imitation of the crazy performances of the victims of hysteria was not difficult; the only recognized cure was by exorcism, and the priests to whose ministrations the patient was confided were not skilled in diagnosis. Under proper conjuration the utterances of the possessed person were held to be those of the possessing demon, who was constrained by the adjuration to tell the truth, and the wild figments of the half-crazed brain, or the cunningly devised falsehoods of the impostor, were sedulously recorded as revealing secrets of the unknown world, or as evidence conclusive upon those against whom they might be directed.

Feigned diabolical possession was by no means infrequent. In a confidential correspondence between Jesuits in 1635, it is related as a good story that recently in Valladolid a lady of quality, reduced to want, pretended to be a demoniac in order to procure subsistence. Two rival exorcists exhausted themselves in contests over her, and crowds flocked to the church to witness the exhibitions. The performer at length found herself unequal to the task of prolonging the deception, and confessed it to one of the exorcists. The honor of the church was involved; he consulted a Jesuit as to the course to be pursued in so delicate a business, and was advised that the supposititious demons should be ejected privately. The woman accordingly was announced to be cured and the matter was hushed up without scandal or damage to the faith.<sup>1</sup>

In this case the fair impostor escaped with great good fortune, for such deceit was a mockery of religion rendering the culprit liable to prosecution by the Inquisition, and occasionally, when publicity could not be avoided, the Inquisition interposed. Among the existing records of the Holy Office of Mexico are two trials, out of a number arising from an epidemic of diabolical possession at Queretaro in 1691, which throw some light on the internal history of such affairs. They also illustrate the frequent connection existing between possession and sorcery, and thus have certain features of resemblance to the contemporaneous witchcraft craze in Salem.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cartas de Jesuitas, *Memorial Histórico Español*, T. xiii. pp. 125-138.

<sup>2</sup> I owe the opportunity of consulting these papers to the kindness of David Fergusson, Esq., of Seattle, who, during a prolonged residence in Mexico, was enabled to accumulate a rich collection of documents from the scattered archives of the Inquisition.

In the spring of 1691 two young girls of Queretaro suffered themselves to be seduced. One of them, named Francisca Mexia, a child in her fifteenth year, lost her lover in August through a prevailing pestilence. He had promised her marriage, and in despair she threw herself into the river. She was rescued insensible, and on being restored to life explained her act by declaring that she had been seized by the hair, lifted through the air, and plunged into the water. It was a clear case of sorcery and demonism; the preservation of her secret required her to keep it up, and this probably was not difficult in the nervous exaltation of her condition. She speedily presented the ordinary symptoms of diabolical possession, and the demons on being exorcised stated that they had been sent by sorceresses whose names were not revealed. About the same time, Juana de las Reyes, the other girl, found that her situation could not be much longer concealed. Probably the example of the Mexia suggested to her the same means of averting suspicion, and she forthwith commenced a similar series of performances. These were of the kind well known to demonologists, — cataleptic rigidity, contortions, screams, wild and blasphemous talk, alternating with periods of rest. The sufferers would be scratched all over by invisible nails and be bitten by invisible teeth; they frequently ejected all sorts of substances from mouth and ears, — stones, mud, wool, pins, paper, toads, snakes, and spiders. One witness gravely declared that while watching one of them she saw the patient's eyes intently fixed on an enormous spider upon the opposite wall; she crossed the room to examine it, and as she watched, it gradually diminished in size and disappeared without moving from the spot.

Although the demons kept silence as to the names of the sorceresses who sent them, the girls had visions in which they frequently saw women. One who repeatedly appeared to them was a Mestiza named Josepha Ramos, commonly called *Chuparatonas*, or Mouse-sucker, employed in an apothecary shop. They did not accuse her of being the cause of their suffering, but the mere fact of seeing her was enough. She was arrested by the secular magistrate and claimed by the Inquisition, which immured her in its secret prison in Mexico, where a chance allusion shows that she was still lying in 1694 with her trial unfinished. I have not the papers of her case and do not know its result, but the Spanish Inquisition was not in the habit of burning witches; its decision as to the so-called diabolical possession scarce justified Josepha's detention, and she probably escaped after prolonged imprisonment due to the customary delays of inquisitorial procedure. Three other women were also arrested on suspicion, but do not seem to have been tried.

The first treatment resorted to with the possessed was to call in

certain Indian wise women, who performed inunction with herbs, producing delirium and stupor without relief. Then the church was appealed to, and Fray Pablo Sarmiento, guardian of the Franciscan convent, came with his friars, and an active course of exorcism was pursued. The *Padres Apostolicos* also took a hand. Public attention was aroused, and effective means were employed to make the most of the opportunity for the edification of the people. Mission services were held at night in the churches, which were filled with curious and excited crowds, eager to witness the performances of the demoniacs and the impressive solemnities of exorcism; and as the attraction increased, the mission in the church of Santa Cruz was kept up all day. A great religious procession was organized in which the women walked barefoot, and the men scourged themselves. Every effort was made to stimulate religious exaltation, with the natural result. The patients steadily grew worse, and the arts of the exorciser proved fruitless. On one occasion Fray Pablo imagined for a moment that he had won a victory in casting out two hundred demons who had been sent by sorcerers, but they were immediately replaced by two hundred fresh ones sent by God. What at first was merely imposture doubtless grew to be, in some degree at least, pathological, as the nerves of the girls became affected by the prolonged excitement. What was more deplorable was that the contagious character of the affection was stimulated to the utmost under the most favorable conditions. At almost every evening service of exorcism some one in the crowd would be carried out convulsed and shrieking, to be at once submitted to a course of exorcism and be converted into a confirmed demoniac. The number grew until it amounted to fourteen, — not all of the gentler sex, for we hear of an old man and a boy who were subjected to such active treatment of fumigations of sulphur and incense by the friars that they died, each declaring with his last breath that he was not possessed, which was explained to be merely an astute trick of the demons to create infidel unbelief.

The epidemic would doubtless have been much more severe had all the ecclesiastics encouraged it, but fortunately they were not unanimous. The Franciscans and Apostolicos had succeeded in monopolizing the affair, and in the traditional jealousy between the various religious orders those which were excluded were necessarily rendered antagonistic. The Dominicans and the Jesuits even, for a moment, forgot their mortal enmity, and they were joined by the Carmelites, in spite of the deadly battle which at that time was raging between them and the Jesuits over the *Acta Sanctorum* and Father Papenbroek. These made common cause in denouncing the whole affair as fraudulent, and they carried with them a portion of



the secular and parochial clergy. Passions on both sides were aroused, the pulpits rang with the clangors of disputation, the people took sides with one party or the other, and in the heat of controversy serious tumults appeared inevitable. In November and December both sides appealed to the Inquisition of Mexico, asking its interposition in their favor. With its customary dilatoriness it postponed action until an unexpected development occurred. Fray Pablo Sarmiento testifies that at 8 P. M., on January 2, 1692, he visited Juana de las Reyes and exorcised her, when she ejected from her mouth pins and wool and paper, and he left her as one dead. On reaching his convent he was told that a friar had been hastily sent for, as she was dying; the friar was not long absent, and on returning secretly informed Fray Pablo that Juana had just given birth to a boy. At first he was dumbfounded, but became greatly consoled on remembering that the *Malleus Maleficarum* provides for such cases, which are not infrequent, by informing us how the demon succeeds in producing such results in a perfectly innocent demoniac. He hastened to Juana's bedside, and in presence of the commissioner of the Inquisition, and of notaries whom he summoned, he questioned her demon, Masambique, and received the most satisfactory assurances, more curious than decent, confirming his theory. The demon, moreover, informed him that two other demoniacs, one of them being Francisca Mexia, were in the same predicament, and would bring forth children in about two months. Fray Pablo returned to his convent, but had scarce more than reached it when word was brought him that the Mexia was about to be confined. Naturally provoked at this untoward coincidence, he at first refused to go to her, but charity prevailed and he went. Her demon, Fongo Bonito, confirmed the fact, described a different process which he had employed, and said that the birth would not occur for a couple of months. It proved a false alarm, arising from hysterical tympanitis, for the Mexia escaped exposure and never had a child.

This *contretemps* might have been expected to end the delusion, but it only stimulated the good frailes to fresh efforts to maintain their position against the sarcastic comments of their adversaries. The children were all miraculous. The one just born had made all hell tremble as he came into the world; he was marked with the letter R in token that he was to be named Raphael; the one to be born of the Mexia would be marked M, to indicate his name of Miguel; a girl seven years of age, one of the possessed, would bring forth another marked F, whose name was to be Francisco IV., — the worthy successor of the three Francises, of Assisi, Paola, and Sales. All these infants in time were to perform immense service to the church.

It was quite time for the Inquisition to interfere. The combined influence of the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Carmelites triumphed. On December 19, a *Junta de Calificadores* had been held, which, although it contained two Franciscans, unanimously came to the conclusion that the demoniacal possession was fraudulent, and that the blasphemies and sacrilegious acts committed by the possessed, and the violent sermons of the friars, were justiciable by the Holy Office. Accordingly on January 9, 1692, a decree was issued peremptorily ordering the cessation of all exorcism, and of all discussion of the subject, whether in the pulpit or in private. The effect was magical. The excitement died away, and the possessed, for the most part, deprived of the stimulus of exorcism and of the attention which their antics had attracted, were speedily cured when left to themselves. Prosecutions were commenced against four of them, and against a Franciscan, Fray Matheo de Bonilla, which dragged along perfunctorily for a few years and seem to have been finally suspended.

All, however, did not escape so easily. Some nervous organizations are too susceptible to undergo agitation so profound without permanent alteration. One of the earliest to sympathize with the demoniacal movement was a girl named Francisca de la Serna, then about eighteen years of age. In her simple zeal she had prayed that God's will be done with her, and that she should suffer if it was his pleasure, whereupon Lucifer himself, with a thousand attendant demons, had entered into her. She was one of those against whom prosecutions were directed; the Inquisition consequently kept an eye on her, and we are able to follow her case. In October, 1692, a report was ordered concerning her, by which we learn that she was in the utmost misery, bodily and mental, — absolutely penniless, incapable of self-support, and dependent on the charity of one or two neighbors. She is described as being in the same state as before the exorcisms were stopped. Sometimes she lies quiet and speechless like a corpse; then she will be furious and blaspheme the Virgin and the saints, and talk insânely; then she will come to her senses, weeping and begging God's mercy and uttering prayers of tender devotion. She was evidently the victim of recurring hysterical attacks, sometimes epileptiform and sometimes maniacal. A year passed away, when in October, 1693, the Inquisition ordered her placed under the spiritual direction of the Rector of the Jesuit College, with power to employ exorcisms, and to report at his convenience whether she was feigning, or was possessed, or was suffering from natural disease. After careful examination the shrewd Jesuit, Father Bernardo Rolandegui, reported that she was not and never had been possessed, and that this was now her own belief. She sometimes became suddenly dumb, while retaining all her senses,

but this was attributable to her having at first been told that it would be so, or from some humors that caused it, or from deceit, or from sorcery. No exorcisms, he said, had been deemed necessary. The next we hear of her is in 1699, when the commissioner at Queretaro applied to the Inquisition for permission to have her exorcised. He describes her as completely under demoniacal possession; the last attack had lasted for ten days; she is dumb and crippled and suffers acutely. The disease was evidently advancing apace; but the Inquisition held good, and merely ordered her to be put under the direction of the Jesuit rector, Phelipe de la Mora, who had succeeded Bernardo Rolandegui. Then for ten years we hear no more of her. The last scene of the tragedy is set forth in a petition from the Jesuit rector, Juan Antonio Perez de Espinosa, in 1709, begging to be released from the charge. Three years before he had made this request and it had received no attention. She daily crawls to his church and occupies his time, interfering with his studies and his duties in the confessional. Exorcisms do her no good, but she occasionally finds relief from blowing in her face, or from saliva applied to the eyes or to the heart. Sometimes she is blind, sometimes deaf, sometimes crippled, and always weak-minded. From numerous experiments he is convinced that it is not diabolical possession, but the influence of the imagination, unless indeed there may be imposture to work upon the compassion of the charitable man who has supported her since 1692. Her case had evidently become one of chronic hysterical hypochondriasis, and her end can only have been complete dementia, unless she was mercifully relieved by death.

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